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Assimilation and the Impossibility of Transculturation: Reading *Herland* as a Captivity Narrative

RACHEL-BETH GAGNON

Although the captivity narrative has its roots in nonfiction accounts of early, often female, settlers being captured by American Indians, the genre's persistence and malleability allow it to influence more modern texts. The genre has changed considerably from its early uses in order to accommodate the changing political and social landscapes. According to Kathryn Zabelle, Derounian-Stodola, and James Arthur Levernier, although captivity narratives from the Puritan period of American history were initially used to express religious morals, "captivity narratives became instead a means for spreading propaganda against those nations and powers that blocked Anglo-American westerly settlement" (23). By characterizing their American Indian captors as "savages," Anglo-Americans could justify land seizure and expansion as the spreading of civilization, but they also used the genre against the French and the English (23). As western expansion continued, the genre experienced a revival

after the U.S.-Mexican War. As Andrea Tinnemeyer argues, "the captivity narrative becomes, like the slave narrative for the Civil War and black-white relations, the vehicle for articulating and interpreting racial conflict in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War" (xvi).

The genre's ability to explore racial and cultural relations through interactions between captors and captives may be read in an even more interesting light in the wake of late nineteenth-century feminism, especially that of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. According to Asha Nadkarni, Gilman was influenced by the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin, which led her to argue that the course of women's evolution had been interrupted by social institutions that allowed men, rather than women, to select their sexual partner¹. Gilman reasoned that, as a result of this interruption in the normal course of evolution, females should be viewed as racially different than males and concluded that "all heterosexual unions are equivalent to race mixing," since the two members are at different "stages of development" in terms of their species (41).

Although it is not known whether or not Gilman was conscious of the genre of the captivity narrative when she wrote *Herland*, the novel's numerous similarities to other captivity narratives make it worthwhile to consider some of the implications of the genre. The first-person ethnographic account through which the story is narrated reflects the style of many of the earlier captivity narratives, in which captured colonists gave detailed accounts of the cultures of their Native American captors. More importantly, the plot of the novel

focuses on the transculturation of the men. Transculturation is the process by which captives adopt or become sympathetic to the culture of their captors. The process can also work in the reverse where the captors adapt certain aspects of their captives' cultures into their own; however, this form of transculturation is less common. Transculturation is also distinct from assimilation as it occurs naturally from captives being exposed to the culture of their captors and choosing it over their own rather than from the captors forcing captives to adopt it. The specific implications and effects of transculturation vs. assimilation within *Herland* will be explored later in this essay, but like many captivity narratives, Gilman uses this process as a means of showing the flaws in her own society by having some of her male characters become transculturated into a society that has no conception of gender, allowing her to promote her scientific ideas about gender. Not only does the captivity narrative offer early twentieth-century writers a space for exploring gender relations as a scientific inquiry, it also allows for an examination of literal racial crossings as the world of the nineteenth century became increasingly globalized and led to anxieties about national identity in the wake of increased border breakdowns and crossings. Since *Herland* is depicted as a near perfect society without famine, inequality, crime, war, or poverty, it is useful to consider the novel as utopian fiction as well. This genre was the popular form during Gilman's time for envisioning the result of a new identity formed from globalization (Peyser 4-5). Gilman utilizes both genres in order to create a perfect society in terms of race and gender that could contrast with her own society and culture through the captor-captive relationship.

Despite the critical attention given to Gilman's novel *Herland* (1915) as a work of feminist or utopian fiction, there has been no attention given to its position as a captivity narrative. These two genres do not need to be viewed as incompatible, and interpreting the novel as a captivity narrative that examines the encounter between a representation of real late-nineteenth/early twentieth-century society and an idealized utopia raises important questions about the prescriptive nature of Gilman's utopia and the actual possibilities it represents for reality. The issues of savagery and civilization that have been explored in the captivity genre since its earliest development in the Indian captivity narratives are crucial to understanding Gilman's characterization of the men's and women's societies. Not only are these issues explicitly explored in Gilman's novel, as the men must redefine the civilized nature of their own society in contrast with that of the Herlanders, but the biological and sociological concerns of the novel also map the ideas of savagery and civilization onto ideas of society as natural or as constructed. The ideal of a common humanity that the narrator, Van, discusses and the Herlanders desire is ultimately the vision of a transculturated world. However, as the civilized utopia becomes increasingly aligned with ideas of construction rather than nature, the possibility of transculturation becomes replaced by assimilation, and even the humanity of the Herlanders becomes questionable, as their society defines them rather than being a result of their individual creation. While Gilman may be using the captivity narrative consciously as a vehicle to explore the differences between the two cultures and assert that the Herlanders' society is preferable to her own, the themes

of border-crossing and transculturation that the genre emphasizes ultimately undermine the practicality of her utopian project.

Although critics have not been reading this novel as a captivity narrative, their focus on Gilman's feminism, use of eugenics, and utopian vision are still valuable in understanding the novel as a whole. In fact, it would not make sense to interpret the novel outside of its feminist concerns, especially when taking into consideration Gilman's clear, public sentiments on issues such as birth control (Craig 23). In addition to her feminist concerns, many critics have examined Gilman's use of eugenics in her novel, which in many ways cannot be separated from her feminism, given the prevalence of the free love movement in the mid to late nineteenth century. Although Gilman was not an advocate of that movement (Craig 22-23), the free love feminists' interest in Darwinism eventually led to its end by 1907, as its advocates' increasing interest in eugenics eventually dominated the whole movement (Hayden 10-11). These lines of analysis have led many critics to see the novel as Gilman's prescription for her society, her utopian vision of how her world should be. However, although it is certainly worth acknowledging how Gilman uses her novel to advocate for her feminist and racial visions and the influence of her time in terms of politics, science, and sociology, the captivity plot of the novel offers a new way of understanding these concerns within a framework designed specifically for social and cultural comparison. While I agree that Gilman's novel has very clear recommendations for society, my interest in reading it as a captivity narrative is

concerned with the process by which utopia is obtained and how the bridging of cultures can only occur in that world through assimilation and through a process of colonization that creates an identity crisis for both the Herlanders and their male captives.

In reading the novel as a captivity narrative, readers are immediately confronted with the possibility of transculturation through Van's narration. As with many captivity narratives, Van's account is not a journal that describes events in real time, but instead he writes about his capture, imprisonment, and time among the Herlanders years afterwards. The authenticity of his account is questioned in the very opening of the story: "This is written from memory, unfortunately. If I could have brought with me the material I so carefully prepared, this would be a very different story" (3). Not only does this statement indicate a sense of fabrication, as Van has to recreate his initial reactions to the Herlanders and their society, but his use of the term "story," as opposed to "account" or "narrative," suggests a fictitious element that contrasts his normally scientific or sociological approaches. This early admission suggests that Van is conscious of the potential falsehoods in telling his story from memory and by extension, his inability to give a completely accurate representation of Herland.

Furthermore, his position as an at least partially transculturated captive at the end of the novel through his marriage to a Herlander named Ellador complicates his admission by introducing the possibility of biases in his narration. In addition to the captivity narrative's

use as a propaganda tool to justify colonization, the accounts of transculturated captives, which Derounian-Stodola and Levernier argue usually depicted the culture of captors as favorable, should be noted for “their biases” as these captives “filtered the experience of captivity through their own cultural perspective” (85). The fact that these captives also faced “editorial and public resistance” (74) gives Van incentive as the narrator to cast doubt on his account, since he is assumed to be writing outside of Herland due to his inability to access his written materials and has to face the judgment of his own society. Given that his society traces its origins to the original captivity narratives and used them as propaganda, his account that reverses the traditional, comfortable position of Anglo-American society in the savage-civilized binary would be poorly received. Not only does reading the novel as a captivity narrative reveal Van’s possibly unconscious biases and motives as a narrator, the history of genre as one based on propaganda forces an awareness of what Van omits from his narrative in order to preserve either his native culture or the culture into which he is later accepted.

The question of Van’s repressions or omissions complicates the savage-civilized binary that remains a prominent focus throughout the novel. The novel begins with the potential to follow the traditional captivity format as it opens with an expedition to an “enormous hinterland of a great river, up where the maps had to be made, savage dialects studied, and all manner of strange flora and fauna expected” (4). The immediate identification of the native cultures as having “savage dialects” and being worthy of study distinguishes them

as less developed than Van’s own culture. Van’s thinking here is in line with that of Gilman who, according to Nadkarni, saw both humanity and cultural evolution as having different degrees of development:

Linking biology and culture into a scientific theory of change, social evolutionary theory provided reformers with a blueprint for progress. This blueprint was furthermore connected to a discourse of civilization that advised making the world over in white reformers’ own image, understanding civilization as “a precise stage in human evolution—the one following the more primitive stages of ‘savagery’ and ‘barbarism’” (36)

By understanding the cultural context that formed Gilman’s beliefs on evolution, which would necessarily place the “savages” Van, Jeff, and Terry encounter on the expedition as both inhabiting a culture less developed than their own and occupying a lower position of an evolutionary ladder of racial development, any possibility of captivity or transculturation from these natives is deferred. As if to confirm the story’s rejection of the traditional captivity narrative, Van immediately follows his description of the first expedition with, “But this story is not about that expedition. That was only the merest starter for ours” (4). This expedition as the potential beginning of a traditional captivity narrative with the possibility of the capture of Anglo-Americans on an imperial journey, the mapping of foreign lands, by the “savage” natives is only considered “the merest starter” for the true story. In this moment, Van not only suggests that his story will break

from the expectations of the genre, but that it will use it as a mere starter, implying the need for a new captivity narrative that fulfills the scientific and cultural needs of early twentieth-century America. Van's narration also serves to highlight issues of defining humanity beyond that of the civilized/savage binary, but in order to fully discuss those concerns, it is necessary to first explore the role of colonization and the utopian project in *Herland*.

With the issue of the real "savages" deferred, the novel can then explore issues of civilization beyond its binary opposition with either savagery or primitivism. As a result, the early colonial fantasies of the men quickly become frustrated. These colonial fantasies also appear in the early propaganda narratives, which "provided an excellent medium for advertising the potential of the frontier territories for private and commercial development and the need to remove and protect those lands from the Indians" (23). The essential fantasy is one where the land desires conquest in order to be preserved and properly used, which is closely related to notions of colonialism as beneficial or in the best interest of the conquered. The colonial fantasy also plays out in some other works from Gilman's time. In his 1923 poem, "The Gift Outright," Robert Frost romanticizes colonization in the line, "The land was ours before we were the land's" (1) and in the idea that the act of conquest or the colonists "giving" themselves to the land was one of "salvation in surrender" (11) despite also being "many deeds of war" (13). There is a suggestion in Frost's poem that to fulfill the colonial fantasy and save both oneself as conqueror and the land, there must

be an act of violence to liberate the land from the natives. The potential for violent encounters with natives also plays out in *Herland*. Terry's jest at Van's suggestion that they might never come back, "'Fraid the ladies will eat you?" (8), is indicative of the common trope in the captivity genre of natives being savage cannibals that begins as early as Columbus and evokes the notion of colonization as necessary for the salvation of the natives. One of the most influential captivity narratives by Mary Rowlandson capitalizes on this idea of natives as cannibalistic: Rowlandson asks American Indian about the fate of her son who had been captured by a different group, and he answers is that "his master roasted him; and that himself did eat a piece of him, as big as his two fingers" (29). While Rowlandson later learns that his answer is a lie, this moment in her narrative highlights the fact that the man she questions is aware of the savage mythology given to natives by their colonizers and how it is used as a justification for the seizure of American Indian lands.

In addition to Terry's evoking of the cannibal myth, the fact that Van describes his vision of Herland as a matriarchal society in which "primeval customs have survived" (9) further enforces the idea of social evolution and inferiority of the Herland natives to the men, and Terry's belief that he will become "king of Ladyland" (12) stresses his colonial fantasy as he sees himself undoing their savage matriarchal society and replacing it with the patriarchal kingship of his own civilized culture. However, these fantasies of the early captivity narrative are quickly dispelled when the men see that the country "looked safe and civilized enough"

(14) and encounter natives who were “civilized and still arboreal” (19), the combination of which suggests a spectrum between savagery and civility rather than a binary. This spectrum then pushes the concerns of the novel closer toward Gilman’s own preoccupation with evolutionary degrees of humanity, race, and society.

The moment that perfectly captures these ideas is when Terry attempts to catch one of the first three Herlanders the men encounter by offering her a necklace, which he terms “bait” (18). Not only does the word “bait” imply that the women are more akin to animals that could be hunted using bait than the civilized men, but the description of the necklace as a “sparkling thing” also implies a kind of simplicity that would allow them to be easily tricked by such shiny objects. This moment resonates with many of the early explorers’ narratives, particularly John Smith’s 1624 account of his captivity and rescue by Pocahontas. When he is first captured by American Indians, whom he calls savages, he demands to see their leader and gives him a compass, which “they marvelled at” (15). He attributes this gift to his salvation when the “King” intervenes, “holding up the Compass in his hand” and later treats Smith to a feast (15). Both Smith and Terry attempt to use objects from their civilized cultures in order to amaze natives that they deem inferior to promote their own goals, which in Smith’s case is his preservation, while Terry later remarks that if he had succeeded in “catching” the girl, who later becomes his wife Alima, they would have more leverage in dealing with their own captivity (32). The fact that Van describes these remarks as spoken “rather savagely” (32) suggests a

complete reversal of the typical savage-civilized binary present in the earlier captivity narratives. This reversal is further emphasized by the women’s decision to place Terry’s “jewels and trinkets” in one of their museums, since they are more interested in their “workmanship” than “ownership” (90). The women not only reverse the binary, but they reverse the process of colonization in their use of the trinkets as “curiosities.” By placing them into museums, they enforce a kind of control over the object and the way it is representative of its culture, which is akin to the way Smith’s narrative comes to represent the story of Pocahontas; despite many problems with authenticity, his account dominates popular culture and mythology, effectively colonizing her story.

The Herlanders can also be seen as a colonial force in the way Jeff and Van undergo a calculated process of transculturation that alienates them from their own society. While transculturation is a common theme in captivity narratives, as captives often adopted the culture of their captors after an extended period of captivity, the system by which the men are adopted into Herland society is more artificial than traditional narratives. In their discussion of transculturated captives, Derounian-Stodola and Levernier mention the cases of Frances Slocum, Mary Jemison, Eunice Williams, and James Smith, who were all adopted into American Indian societies in a literal sense as they established familial connections during their captivities (73-75). In Herland, the men cannot become family until they are already transculturated. In fact, they are told they are not allowed to leave their confinement and walk freely amongst the women until they “learned the language

– and would agree to do no harm” (46). However, in addition to learning the language, they are also required to learn about the Herland culture and teach their own and, they are not even allowed to use scissors until they are “sufficiently tamed and trained” (74). The need to “train” the men in order to prevent their doing “harm” indicates an anxiety on the part of the Herlanders over possibly dangerous ideas men could bring from their society. Instead of transculturation being a natural process in which ideas can be shared from both cultures, the Herlanders enact a process that is more akin to forced cultural assimilation or brainwashing. Gilman could have witnessed a similar form of assimilation in her own time through the Indian boarding schools, which were designed to strip American Indians of their cultural identities and indoctrinate them into white American society.²

The conscious process of assimilation rather than transculturation indicates another reversal in the traditional captivity narrative, as the women captors take on the role of colonizer rather than the male captives. This process of assimilation prevents the men from fulfilling the mythology associated with male captives that allows them to free themselves from the restricting influences of society through their trials in the wilderness, while simultaneously bringing the knowledge they received from their captors back to their own society in order to further progress (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 42-44). Whereas transculturation offers a means of cultural exchange for both parties, assimilation can only be accepted or rejected; captives can either trade their culture for that of their captors

or completely reject it. Terry’s anger at the end of the novel prevents him from any recognition that the Herlanders have positive aspects, Jeff becomes completely subsumed by their culture and refuses to leave, and, although Van represents the only hope of fulfilling this masculine fantasy, the novel closes before he returns home. While Van does return in the sequel, *With Her in Ourland* (1916), he fails to bring the progress he witnesses in the Herlander culture back to his own, since he and Ellador eventually decide to return to Herland. Unlike the men, however, the Herlanders are able to fulfill this colonial fantasy in their own history, as they act upon the feminine mythology of women captives bringing small amounts of civilization into the wild (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 45-46). Captive in their own land after facing war and natural disasters, the women reject a process of masculine colonization when they kill off the uprising slaves³. Afterwards they begin a feminine process of colonization as they take control over the land and cultivate it to a state of civilized perfection as nearly every tree in their forests are food producing, space-wasting livestock have been eliminated, and many of the pests that attack their crops have been systematically killed off. In using a process of colonization in order to achieve her utopian civilization, Gilman seems to suggest that women may be better suited for the process than men and that this perfection can be spread to other societies only through calculated assimilation rather than force or violence.

However, this colonized utopia and the possibility of assimilating the men, and by extension their culture, raises questions about what kind of people fit

into the utopian vision, especially considering the Herlanders' use of eugenics to maintain peace in their society. The two genres of utopian fiction and captivity narratives are already loaded with anxieties about cultural border-crossings. As Tinnemeyer argues, the nineteenth century saw an increase in anxiety due to the breaking down of borders post U.S.-Mexican War, specifically in, "the white nuclear family, threatened from within by the zealous attempts to maintain racial and familial purity and respectability, and from without by the empire-building of Manifest Destiny" (xviii). As a genre concerned with defining a national identity through one's relationship to the other or outsider, the captivity narrative functions in *Herland* both to stress the women's own colonial interests in expanding their influence to the outside world and to introduce anxieties over how the men struggle to maintain their own national identity in the wake of their captivity, much of which is established through Van's narration. The concern with border-crossing present in utopian fiction introduces a fear of cultural and racial contamination: "Late-nineteenth-century utopias may be seen as an attempt to contain such a cosmopolitan threat to the integrity of any tradition of thought or action whatever. Culture was no longer a home, but rather a menu or a museum in which any number of possible lives or traditions offered themselves for view or adoption" (Peyser 20). The utopian anxiety in the wake of increased globalization is a fear of absolute transculturation in which individuals can seamlessly move from one culture to another, threatening the very idea of national identity as based on a specific racial or cultural ideal. The combined result for Gilman's utopia is that it requires certain racial,

gendered, or evolutionarily advanced members in order to maintain is hierarchal position in relation to other societies, specifically that of early twentieth-century America. The problem for Gilman then becomes how to rectify the need to maintain those standards of purity while acting on her colonial project of civilizing the world through the spreading of the feminist ideology the novel promotes.

Gilman's scientific influence and belief in different racial levels of evolutionary development within humanity ultimately leads to the failure of the Herlanders to fully assume their role as colonizer, and by extension their ability to spread their perfect culture. As Thomas Peyser argues, Gilman's anxieties over globalization were motivated by the increasing prevalence of rhetoric that combined all women, regardless of race under the term female (73). The result is that in *Herland*, "Gilman fuses the questions of race and gender, taking the globalization of female identity as a sign of the women's degradation—*white* women's degradation, that is" (74). He concludes later that this anxiety over racial contamination is what leads to the isolation of Herland from the outside, as he claims, "For Gilman, real cultural imperialists, those sustained by a sure sense of their superiority and race, stay at home" (86). Peyser's argument here suggests that the Herlanders adopt a policy of isolationism due to anxieties over racial or cultural contamination that would threaten their own perfection, but in their policy of isolation, they fail to be an effective colonial force that could spread their ideology. However, beyond these surface-level fears of miscegenation lies a deeper anxiety about the definition

of humanity and the tension between the natural process of evolution and artificial social constructs.

Returning to the issue of Van's narration, it is in moments of his unconscious slippage and omissions that these issues of humanity are most clear. As an assimilated captive, he consciously wants to portray the culture of the Herlanders as superior to or, in the very least, equal with his own. Due to this motivation, there are moments when he omits details that would paint their culture as dangerous or insidious. One of the most obvious is in his suppression of a potential punishment for criminals. When Van's wife, Ellador, talks about their lack of punishments, she claims, "We have preventative measures, and cures; sometimes we have to 'send the patient to bed,' as it were; but that's not a punishment—it's only part of the treatment" (112). The fact that Van records Ellador's use of the phrase "send the patient to bed," which is assumed to be a colloquial phrase or euphemism common in her culture, but does not explain its meaning to his readers from his own society suggests that he is suppressing it. The phrase resonates at the end of the novel when, fearing Terry will refuse to hide their existence from the outside world after they have determined they are not yet ready to become part of the global community, the women claim "he must remain an absolute prisoner, always," and his tutor, Moadine, urges "anesthesia" instead (143). Despite the numerous times in his narrative that Van points out the Herlanders' non-violence and rejection of killing, the novel ends on this ambiguous note where it seems that Moadine is suggesting that Terry essentially be put in a coma to facilitate his absolute imprisonment.

In addition to emphasizing Van's cultural assimilation in his suppression of this kind of living death "cure" to criminality and the colonial attributes of the Herlander society as one in which absolute assimilation is expected of all members of the society, their "cure" introduces some violence into the nature of the otherwise perfect women. Although it is not necessarily violent in the obvious sense, their treatment of criminals is ethically questionable and characterizes them as more human, in the sense that they are more flawed, than earlier descriptions of them as angels, bees, or ants.

While the Herlanders maintain some aspects of their humanity, Van's constant assertions that they are human raise doubt as to the degree of their humanity and how much their society controls their behavior. Van seems self-conscious of the Herlanders' lack of humanity, which leads to conspicuous language such as, "Here you have human beings, unquestionably" (59). His very need to assert that their humanity is "unquestionable" suggests that he feels the need to convince himself in addition to convincing his readers. In contrast to these assertions are the descriptions of the women as insects, as Jeff compares the cooperative nature of their society to that of bees or ants (68). When Van later tries to describe the marriages of the three men and how they attempted to come to terms with their wives' lack of passion and sexual desire beyond that of reproduction, he gives two examples: "the lower one" as interactions between a male and female ant and "the higher one" as an impassioned man trying to marry an "Angel" (122). The comparison of "high" and "low" forms of life resonates with Gilman's own ideas about the spectrum of

human evolution between savage and civilized, suggesting that the Herlanders are either below or above the men. While the ant metaphor can be aligned with a sense of savagery through its connection with nature, the angel metaphor is aligned with civilization as it rises about what is natural in pursuit of perfection. It is their society that is able to liberate the Herlanders from their base, natural state, but in the process, they lose some of their humanity.

Despite the fact that Gilman was not a free love feminist, that movement's views on the tension between nature and society would have been prominent in the literature of Gilman's time, and their ideas are useful in making sense of this tension in the novel. Society has the potential to "pervert" the course of natural evolution through institutions like marriage, which prevented women from choosing their mates as they would in nature (Hayden 61-34). Gilman herself asserted this claim in terms of her theory of the Primal Rape, in which the natural course of female dominated sex selection was prevented once primal man realized he could control the reproduction of the human species by putting the female in a submissive role (Nadkarni 40-41). While it may seem then that society is detrimental to human evolution, free love feminists also argued for the importance of human control over the course of evolution in order to achieve a more advanced level of civilization through institutions like education (65), which the Herlanders claim is a major factor in their own success. In order to obtain the "higher" form of evolution, the Herlanders allow their society to control almost every aspect of their behavior.

This higher level of humanity requires, however, the removal of certain responsibilities in the traditional interplay between humans and culture. Society in Herland becomes a force that creates its people rather than the reverse. Although Van claims that the women are "Conscious Makers of People" through their use of eugenics to weed out undesirable or criminal traits in their society by forbidding certain women from reproducing, it is really their social systems that create them. The women have perfected their system of education by only allowing those most fit to teach their children and distribute labor responsibilities based on the talent a person has to critique or invent. The women thus allow their society to dictate their actions based on what is best in terms of progress, and in turn their society yields better systems of controlling their actions and mindsets in order to achieve that goal. The highest stage of social evolution or civilization for Gilman would then appear to be one in which all human elements are removed. Just as early captivity narratives gave colonial forces a means of establishing their identities in relation to their perceived others, the Herlanders' society undergoes a kind of self-colonization in which it continuously subordinates its own citizens and rationalizes that process by defining itself in terms of its uncivilized or underdeveloped past, represented by stages in which it was farther away from the ultimate goal of progress.

Despite the captivity narrative's ability to provide ground for cultural and social exchange through the process of transculturation, Gilman's evolutionary theories and the utopian genre's anxieties about miscegenation prevent any transmission of culture. The

women are unable to engage in the process of transculturation because of the self-colonizing aspects of their society that force them to surrender the humanity of their culture. The places where they do retain their human attributes most clearly reveal unethical or potentially violent means of maintaining order, which suggests that their only means of cultural transmission is through assimilation. If the men were to transmit aspects of their culture, which is depicted as an evolutionarily lower status, closer on the spectrum to barbarism or savagery than the Herlanders' transculturation would result in a lowering of their status and the corruption of their utopian vision. Ultimately, the degree to which the novel can serve as a prescription for social reform is limited; the Herlanders' society fails to become a colonial force that can spread its ideology as it retreats into isolationism. As a result, it is unable to offer a pathway for the modern, less evolved human to ever achieve the evolutionary status of a Herlander beyond its project of assimilation, which only offers a way of superficially mimicking the utopian society. Even with its origins as a source of propaganda, its increased anxieties over the preservation of national identity that developed by Gilman's time make the captivity narrative surprisingly unfit for promoting the feminist ideology of *Herland*.

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Endnotes

1 Gilman theorized that the origin of this problem was what she termed “Primal Rape” in which early man saw that it would be easier to rape and imprison the female rather than compete with other males for her choice. As a result, females developed according to the desires of man rather than natural biological imperative (Nadkarni 40).

2 Zitkala-Sa’s narrative is one of the most notable boarding school narratives, and it bears direct comparisons to Gilman’s novel. Although the men are encouraged to “teach” the Herlanders their own language and customs, like Zitkala-Sa, they must learn the language of their captors, assume their way of dress, and receive rigorous education about their ways of life.

3 The slaves’ attempt to control the women by killing off the remaining men and older women is depicted as the last in a series of “misfortunes” that finally becomes “too much for those infuriated virgins,” prompting them to rise up in “sheer desperation” to “slew their brutal conquerors” (56). The fact that being conquered by the slaves, who would have been seen as socially and, in the context of Darwinian thinking, biologically inferior, is the most unbearable aspect of their tragedy, not only reinforces the notion of a cultural and racial hierarchy, but it resists the traditional captivity narrative. Instead of the group characterized as less civilized, the slaves, capturing the dominant group or colonizer, the novel resists this even as a possibility. The subsequent extermination of the slaves by the white women is a colonization process that reasserts what Gilman would see as the restoration of the natural order, since it not only restores what she believed to be a natural racial hierarchy but a gendered hierarchy as well. The lack of men reverses the Primal Rape that characterized women as secondary to men and restores their identity as human.

About the Author

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